

"Oaklands"
South end of Dresden Street
approximately .13 mile west of
Kennebec River
Gardiner
Kennebec County
Maine

HABS No. ME-113

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Eastern Office, Design and Construction
143 South Third Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

"OAKLANDS"

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Address: South end of Dresden Street, approximately .13 mile west of Kennebec River, Gardiner, Kennebec County, Maine.

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Present Owner: Oaklands Corporation; Robert Hallowell Gardiner, President; 10 Post Office Square, Boston, Mass.

Present Use: Summer residence of Robert Hallowell Gardiner.

Brief Statement of Significance: This structure is a large granite Gothic Revival house designed in 1835-36 by Richard Upjohn, architect. "Oaklands" is architecturally unique in Maine and the house of a family important in both state and national history.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

- A. Original and Subsequent Owners: Robert Hallowell Gardiner, through a succession of first sons to the present Robert Hallowell Gardiner.
- B. The following account of "Oaklands" is from Everard M. Upjohn's biographical account of his great-grandfather, Richard Upjohn (pp. 38-43):

"The notebooks [of Richard Upjohn] of 1835 are full of entries of letters and packages sent to R. H. Gardiner, Gardiner, Maine, for the Gothic mansion 'Oaklands,' which was begun in that year. The original drawings [see HABS photocopies], signed 'Rd. Upjohn, Arch,' include plans for the ground and second floors with the poché in gray and elevations of the east, north, and south fronts, all at the unusual scale of twelve feet to an inch. The latter are rendered in water color, gray for the stone, light blue for the windows, cool gray to indicate a slate roof, and the whole resting on an unpleasant muddy-green strip representing the lawn. Though the house as built follows these designs quite closely, especially the east elevation, they can hardly be described as working drawings but rather as sketches to give the client some idea of the scheme. Such modifications as were made then or later tend to complicate the very simple silhouette. Little but the chimneys would have been visible above the parapet battlements had the original scheme been followed in its entirety.

"The plan seems to be influenced by the foundation of an earlier house which had to be used again in part, and perhaps some of the Georgian aroma of the interior may be due to that. The disposition of the rooms on the east front

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is far more Georgian than Tudor, and the ample stair hall has little of the Gothic about it. The clustered shafts forming a newel come as a distinct surprise.

"Commonly, the hopes raised by the quaintly picturesque drawings of this period, especially of those structures based on medieval styles, are dashed when the building itself is visited. In 'Oaklands,' the exact opposite is true. How much the attractiveness of the place may depend on the neat lawns with a screaming macaw on the hedge is difficult to know. Certainly the grounds provide just the setting which is needed for the house, and the present owners are to be congratulated on the taste with which the place is maintained, both within and without. To say that 'Oaklands' gives precisely the feeling of a medieval manor house is not quite accurate. Though reasonably correct in style, its deliberate symmetry leaves a dash of the Georgian to dilute the primarily Tudor suggestion by a flavor of localism, as the English portrait style in painting is modified by Copley, some of whose canvases are preserved within. The tendency toward simplification of silhouette and justness of proportion is no less evident than in the Greek Revival houses of Bangor, but here it is the more remarkable in view of the temptations afforded to the nineteenth century to seek out the falsely picturesque in neo-medieval work. The avoidance of purely decorative detail is striking. . . . it is noticeable that the windows are covered only by a hood moulding, that the battlements are quite plain, and that the wall surface is undisturbed by any form of applied decoration. The proportions alone afford the house its distinction.

"So striking a house in such a setting was bound to become famous at once. Hawthorne wrote of it in his American Notebooks as follows:

'The new building was estimated, I believe, to cost about thirty thousand dollars; but twice as much has already been expended, and a great deal more will be required to complete it. It is certainly a splendid structure; the material, granite from the vicinity. At the angles, it has small, circular towers [a footnote added by Everard Upjohn states that these towers are of course octagonal buttresses]; the portal is lofty and imposing; relatively to the general style of domestic architecture in our country, it well deserves the name of castle or palace. Its situation, too, is fine, far retired from the public road, and attainable by a winding carriage-drive, standing amid fertile fields, and with large trees in the vicinity. There is also a beautiful view from the mansion adown the Kennebec' [Randall Steward, ed. The American Notebooks, July 11, 1837, p. 8].

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"A letter of June 7, 1836, reveals some contemporary methods of practice. Where today full-sized details and very exact working drawings would be submitted for each detail of the house, both as originally designed and as altered in the process of construction, methods were then much more summary and were left to the understanding of the builders and client.

'Boston June 7 1836

Sir

Mr. Jones called yesterday respecting the chimnies. I believe you stated to me that the bases of them were cut which would prevent alteration. I do not think any other form would look so well as an octagon but as you are desirous of altering them I submit this for your consideration. [Everard Upjohn indicates that a slight sketch was inserted here.] It varies from the present plan by having the smaller sides still more reduced so that the chimney would be a square with the angles cut off. You can on enquiry find what your stonecutters would charge for such and whether the difference in the charge of the two plans would warrant any alterations.

'I should like you to try the following mixture for a cement which is very easily done.

'1 Cask of Hydraulick lime

1 " " Common "

2 " " good sharp grit sand

'A less quantity of each will do keeping the same proportion.

'R. H. Gardiner, Esq.

With the greatest respect

Your most obt. Servt.

Rich Upjohn

... "we find him [Upjohn] the following year [1838] submitting his bill for work done three years before. The first half of the bill seems to have been paid earlier, but a balance of \$156.63 remained unsettled and covered work from October 5, 1835, to September 5, 1836 [Account Book No. 1]. Evidently Gardiner felt that he had paid enough and that the architect had overcharged him in view of the various inconveniences inherent in any building project which clients are apt to lay at the architect's door. His letter of protest has not been found, but the reply is preserved.

'Boston Nov 23 1838

Sir

Yours of the 19 inst came to hand the 21st and this is the reply. You expected when you agreed that the days should be 'common days.' Since it was your expectation let it be so. Nevertheless 8 hours is my day and \$6 per day my charge for the generallity of work and which I

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have rec'd for two years past. 'A good deal of work drawn wrong which had to be sent back and drawn over again.' Your letter of May 27 1835 and my answer thereto is a sufficient explanation and shows that the men on the works were not capable of understanding the plan notwithstanding it was set out full size on the barn floor. My letter of June 2 1835 is another refutation of 'a good deal.' Your letter of June the 15 1835 turned a great deal of the masonry as planned by me topsy turvy. You sent me word thereof with a sketch of the alteration of the interior laying down the rooms as suggested by you. I gave you correct plans of said work. At the time I see no complaint on reading the letters of correspondence about the plans being done wrong. 'A great deal of unnecessary work done on the working plans.' I do not estimate the value of a plan by the mere labor bestowed on the same as that is merely secondary. I have never drawn plans for you simply to make labour and thereby increase the number of days work. I have and my assistants have spent more time by far than has been charged on my acct. Your plans were done with as little expence as possible and taking into consideration that you called on me to give you plans for a building of such magnitude when the cellars were digging--that the plans were necessarily got up in great haste--that the distance from Boston to Gardiner being so great prevented my seeing the works so often as I ought--that you were continually chang [sic] your mind in relation to many important points while the building was actually in a state of progress, that you never had a man on the building fully qualified to conduct its erection, that your letters to me were generally written in great haste, that my plans had to be sent off piecemeal instead of their being made all at one time and compared one with another, copied, revised, and arranged in the usual methodical manner; I say taking these things duly into consideration and that your house so far as it has been finished does meet your expectation and that the architectural effect thereof is good, there can be no just reason at this late hour for complaining of my bill, for deteriorating the value of my services, for complaining and finding fault with my plans when there is no just cause for so doing. The \$70 proposal is a monstrous reduction--The bill is honest, my circumstances oblige me to accept what I cannot in justice to myself assent to. I have just been requested to give in my terms for superintending a building just about being erected after plans by myself. 5 per cent on the cost was my charge which was pronounced reasonable. [Punctuation added by the author of the biography.]

'R. H. Gardiner Esq.

Very respectfully
your most obt sevt
Rich^d Upjohn

P.S. Please to send by
return of post.

"Since there is no indication of the 'monstrous reduction' in the account book, it seems likely that the letter of protest took effect and that Gardiner settled the bill as rendered. At that the fee was certainly moderate. Even taking the estimated cost as given by Hawthorne, five percent would amount to \$1,500--whereas the full charge was \$436.63 [Account Book No. 1]. Of course, full superintendence was not give to 'Oaklands,' but a charge of double the amount would not have been unreasonable. Still, the current scale of prices was pretty low. Even assuming the utmost simplicity, the charge to 'Mr. Stone For working plans of house \$4.00' strikes one today as extraordinary. In this case the drawings were probably at quarter scale, for a standard type of house of small dimensions and without specifications or superintendence. An extra charge seems normally to have been made for specifications."

- C. Construction: Original ground-floor plan and two elevations--at one time in the possession of the Upjohn Family and now at the Avery Library, Columbia University--not strictly followed, as they were meant only to give an idea to the client. (See HABS photocopies.)

D. Sources of Information:

Green, Samuel M. Personal interview with Mrs. Robert Hallowell Gardiner, Sr. and Robert Hallowell Gardiner. June 1962.

Hanson, J. W. History of Gardiner, Pittston, and West Gardiner, Gardiner: 1852.

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. The American Notebooks. Edited by Randall Stewart. New Haven: 1932.

Upjohn, Everard M. Richard Upjohn, Architect and Churchman. New York: Columbia University Press, 1939.

Upjohn, Richard. "Account Book, No. 1." Receipts, May 19, 1834-Feb., 1839. Listed in Everard M. Upjohn's biography, but location not indicated.

Prepared by Samuel M. Green
Wesleyan University
June 1962

AND
John C. Poppeliers, Architectural
Historian
National Park Service
October 1963

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PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: This structure is a large granite Gothic Revival house designed in 1835-36 by Richard Upjohn, who later designed Trinity Church in New York City. Especially significant are the stairway, details, and large-scale interior spaces.
2. Condition of fabric: Excellent. Minor changes do not destroy the initial concept.

B. Technical Description of the Exterior

1. Number of stories, over-all dimensions, etc.: This structure consists of a main house of two stories with a two-and-a-half story ell. Over-all dimensions are 93'-1 1/2" x 95'-2 3/4".
2. Foundation: The building is situated on bedrock; exterior foundation walls are faced with granite ashlar to the exterior and backed with brick and fieldstone. Monolithic granite piers, brick piers, wood posts, brick partitions, and brick fireplace foundations.
3. Wall construction: Exterior walls are faced with granite ashlar quarried in Hallowell. The finish is hammered. Buttresses or octagonal towers occur at all exterior corners. Buttresses are smooth finish, capped at off-sets at second-floor level. Parapet walls are embattled, the merlons or solid parts of the battlement have molded caps.

The octagonal towers have molding at the second-floor level and at the roof line, with embattled parapet. Iron straps are embedded into the wall as fasteners for vine wires.

4. Porches, stoops:

- a. Entry porch: Stone walls, buttressed at exterior corners, molded stone cornice, Tudor arch opening, rectangular window glazed with fixed glass. Stone floor and steps; iron boot scrapers. Plaster ceiling. Flat and mansard roofs.
- b. Rear (garden) entrance: Stone steps, wood trellis.
- c. Service entry: Formerly ice house. Stone stoop.

5. Chimneys: Miscellaneous stone chimneys. Groups of one, two, and three octagonal stacks (one flue each) with cornices. Several rectangular stone chimneys with molded stone cornices.

6. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors:

- (1) Entry: Tudor arch opening, rectangular screen door with head shaped to fit opening. Twelve-paneled wooden door (originally double doors 2 5/8" thick). Reveal of opening is paneled wood.
- (2) Rear (garden) entrance: Five-paneled wooden door. Pointed arch filled with stained glass head light. Reveal of opening is paneled.
- (3) Rear (service) entrance: Fifteen-paneled wooden door. Simple rectangular doorway.

b. Windows: Window openings are splayed to interior, and the external angle of jamb chamfered. The stone at the head and top part of jambs is smooth to suggest label molding. Window openings have fixed sash over casements: four-over-four, six-over-ten, six-over-six, nine-over-twenty-one lights. Some single hung six-over-six, eight-over-eight, four-over-four, and two-over-two lights. Windows in all major rooms have inside shutters. No exterior shutters; pintles remain.

7. Roof:

a. Shape, cover, cornice, etc.: Mansard, gable, and flat roofs. Coverings include slate shingles, sheet copper, and built-up roofing. No cornice or eave on main house. Bronze gutters and down spouts. Stone splash blocks. Hip roof, slate shingles on service entry.

b. Skylights:

- (1) Attic stair skylight; pyramid, eight lights.
- (2) Central stair; twenty-four-light cover and two flat ten-light inner sash; weather vane (wind direction indicator) on roof.

B. Technical Description of Interior

1. Floor plans:

a. Basement: Full basement divided by brick and frame walls; wood, brick, granite piers; brick fireplace foundation.

- b. First floor: Irregular L-shaped plan, with three rooms on each side of central hall (containing a large staircase), and with a side service wing.
- c. Second floor service ell: Four rooms off a center service stair hall.
- d. Second floor, main house: Similar to first-floor plan.
- e. Third floor service ell: Four rooms about center service stair hall. Stairs to fourth floor service ell and attic, main house.
- f. Fourth floor service ell and attic main house: Rooms grouped about light court of central stair hall, stair to water tank room (tank removed), ladder to roof.

2. Stairways:

- a. Central stair, main house: "Flying" stairway, turned newels and balusters, two balusters per tread, molded rail, 7 1/4" rise, 10 1/2" tread, paneled stringer. Stair continues to balcony of second floor at perimeter of stair hall.
- b. Stairway, service ell: Straight run, turned newels, round balusters, boxed stringer, molded railing.
- c. Basement stair: Straight run.
- d. Attic stair: "U" stair, nine winders, square newels, three square balusters per tread.
- e. Secondary stair, landing central stairway to nursery.
- f. Stair to water tank room. Straight run, 1'-0" wide.

- 3. Flooring: Wood boards and strips, painted and/or varnished. Original one-piece linoleum in entry and central stair hall (imported from England); imported linoleum in back hall also; marble panels under water closets; sisal-like covering (one room only).
- 4. Walls: Plaster, painted, papered, or covered with fabrics. Paneled wainscot (square panel with four-cusp foil over panel with foiled head decoration); molded wood chair rail above painted fabric wainscot; car siding in attic rooms.
- 5. Ceilings: Plaster. Bold plaster cornices in major rooms and hallways.

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6. Doorways and doors: Heavy molded wooden frames. Two-paneled (tudor arches) wooden doors, 2" thick throughout main house; one and two paneled doors in ell. Sliding doors, two per Tudor-arched opening between major rooms of first floor (east side); each door paneled to resemble tracery, and 2 1/2" thick. Opening between entry and stair hall has a center pendant and decorative impost blocks. Pendants and blocks are of wood, carved in a leaf pattern.
7. Trim: Interior shutters in major rooms, east side, decorated with foils and tracing resembling wainscot, metal tracery screwed to wood ground. Interior window shutters rectangular paneled or louvered elsewhere. Plaster or wood rosettes on fascia of skylight opening in central stair hall. Plaster centerpieces in major rooms. Paneled decoration, including escutcheons, over fireplace in central room, east side, first floor.
8. Hardware: Glass door knobs; iron door knocker, pulls, and door handles. Sink in pantry, square bath tub in attic, and window locks are of interest. Iron lanterns in stair hall of first and second floors.
9. Lighting: Modern electric.
10. Heating: Modern forced warm air heating system replaces earlier steam heat, replaces gravity warm air heating. Major rooms have fireplaces, one Franklin stove.

D. Site:

The structure is located on an approximately 400 acre estate on the west bank of the Kennebec river near Gardiner, reached by an extension of Dresden Street.

Open fields lie to the north and west, with woods elsewhere. A stone bridge spans a gully south of the building. The house faces north-northeast.

There are no outbuildings in the immediate vicinity. Barns and other outbuildings are on the estate. Informal landscaping, hedge screens service yard. Numerous crushed stone walks and drives.

Prepared by F. Blair Reeves, Architect
National Park Service
August 1962